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A LETTER TO A SUNDAY-SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT.

By SHAILER MATHEWS,
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MY DEAR SIR :

It is in no spirit of criticism that I make these few suggestions. We all know your devotion to your school and to the religious interests of its members—although sometimes you are perhaps a trifle thoughtless in displaying this interest. But it has seemed to me that it might be possible for you to get better results from your school if you were to consider one or two matters in its management. For instance, why do you not attempt to organize the school more systematically? You have, of course, your assistant superintendent and your secretary and other officers; but, after all, to have these officers is but the beginning of efficient organization. Each has his own duties, and, on the whole, he performs them well; but do they work with sufficient unity? Why may they not be treated as a sort of board of directors, or, if you prefer, cabinet, which shall hold stated meetings for the discussion of the affairs of the school? Each officer sees needs that you do not, and in the discussion of the conduct of the school you will be surprised to find how many helpful suggestions your officers can make. Of course, you have already a teachers' meeting, but even this cannot be of the same service as a meeting of those who are especially concerned with the matter of administration rather than instruction.

And this suggests another matter. Has your school utilized all its members capable of doing some special thing exceptionally well? A school ought to be so organized that its management is in the hands of a considerable number of persons, each of whom can be counted upon for a definite service, like caring for the benevolence, the music, the instruction. If they are brought into the proper relations, your own work will be greatly lightened and a larger number of efficient persons will be interested in the school. It goes without saying that the administration of the school is sure to be improved.

This naturally suggests the fundamental question: What is the real function of the superintendent? To judge from fairly wide observation, most men regard it as consisting in conducting the public exercises of

the school and occasionally adding a few words of advice or exhortation—and sometimes you do this very well indeed. But ought not a superintendent to attempt to develop his school along the line of some definite policy? Have you ever stopped to decide whether you want your school to be noted for one virtue rather than another, for one class of persons rather than another? If you have not, who has, or will? This will certainly appear reasonable to you, for you are a business-man. But let your officers share in this decision. Some day, if you should see fit to hold a meeting of your officers, after you have settled when and how the pupils are to get their library books, ask for an expression of opinion as to whether the school is to be conducted primarily on educational or on revivalist lines. No matter whether your officers agree among themselves or not, let them grapple with the question. It may be new to them. At the next meeting propose another question of general policy, or else, if they seem interested, discuss what methods should be adopted to make the school develop along the line preferred. Of course, you must direct the discussion, and very probably explain your own plan of action; but in asking advice you will at all events get your officers to thinking along necessary lines, and you will gain helpers who know what you are trying to accomplish.

And this suggests a delicate matter: your conduct of the public exercises of the school. Of course, you want to preside. Generally you read the Scripture, make the prayer, give out the hymns, and make the short address. You do it very well, but might it not be done better? Do you really prepare for the exercise? If so, why should you stumble over the proper names? Why do the children pay so little attention to your prayer? Why are your remarks so much alike Sunday after Sunday?

May it not be that you could intrust a part of the exercises to someone else? There must be some man in your school who would consent, for instance, to read the Scriptures. Perhaps there are several who might share in the exercises. You should undoubtedly preside, although it is not impossible that even this duty might be given over to some specially gifted man. But generally you can accomplish more by identifying yourself with the public service, and attending to such duties as you can perform effectively. Only it will do no harm to remember that your chief duty is not so much that of a public speaker as that of an organizer. You are to direct the school, to make it effective as a means of religious growth for all its members.

One word in closing. Do not forget that you are as marked a

religious leader as the pastor. If you get the reputation for honesty in business, for cleanness and godliness of life, for kindliness and charity, you will be the model of many a boy. But if you get a reputation of another sort, you will be all the more a damage to the church and the Sunday school because you are a success in your important office.